At the 13th meeting of the India-China Joint Working Group that was held in Beijing on 31st July, 2001, both sides agreed that the present momentum in bilateral relations should be maintained and enhanced, including through further high level exchanges.

The second round of the India-China Security Dialogue was held in New Delhi earlier this year. The next round will be held in China at a mutually convenient date. India and China have established an Eminent Persons' Group. The first meeting of the Group is expected to take place later this year.

Our bilateral trade has been steadily expanding. In the year 2000, trade was US$ 2.92 billion, an increase of 47% over the previous year. As per Chinese statistics, in the first six months of year 2001, bilateral trade has reached US$ 1.79 billion, an increase of 36.5% over the same period last year. Both sides are making efforts to further expand trade and economic cooperation.

There has also been a diversification of exchanges in the fields of education, culture, science & technology, information technology, labour etc.

Use of Internet in the Country

†2656. SHRI P.K.MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the use of internet is not increasing with expected speed in the country;

(b) if so, whether more than 90 percent use of internet is in practice in developing countries;

(c) if so, the reasons for not increasing the pace of internet use in the country; and

(d) whether Government have taken any concrete steps in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) The use of Internet in India is growing at a fast pace. On March 31, 1999, the number of internet subscribers in India was 2.3 lakhs which increased to 9 43 lakhs as on 31.3.2000 and to 29.69 lakhs as on 31.3.2001. It is estimated that only 12% of Internet users in the world are in developing countries.

(d) Yes, Sir. Government has taken several steps to promote use of Internet. A list of steps taken is placed in the Statement.

Statement

Steps taken by Government for Promotion of Internet

1. Internet Service Provider (ISP) licences are given to Indian Companies on non-exclusive basis. There is no requirement of the applicant company having any prior experience in Information Technology or Telecom Services.

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†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

2. Licence fee upto 31.10.2003 has been waived and subseqeuntly, only a nominal licence fee of Rs. 1/- per annum.

3. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been permited to set up International Gateways for Internet using satellite and submarine cable medium after getting security clearance. ISPs setting up International Gateways for Internet have been permitted to sell bandwidth to other ISPs.

4. A Bandwidth Advisory Committee consisting of eminent personalities of the IT and Telecom Industry has been set up to advise Department of Telecommunications (DOT) on the steps to be taken to ensure that bandwidth is available on demand.

5. Setting up of National Internet backbone by BSNL to carry Internet traffic.

6. Commissioning of Sanchar Sagar Project by BSNL providing large bandwidth across major cities.

7. Under National Long Distance Policy, there are two categories of Infrastructure Providers (IP) nemely, IP-I who can provide assets such as dark fibres, right of way, duct space etc. and IP-II who can provide end to end bandwidth.

8. BSNL, has set up National Internet Backbone (NIB) network with 45 Internet nodes parenting other internet nodes and connected to the VSNL, Gateways at Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Pune.

9. Internet nodes have been set up in hilly areas like Shillong, Imphal, Kohima, Almora, Solan etc.

10. Internet facility is being extended to the customers on local call charge basis to the nearest node.

11. Internet facility has been extended to 5417 Block Headquarters of the Country as on 31.3.2001.

12. 1019 Internet Dhabas were opened in the Country as on 31.3.2001.

13. To promote Internet Dhabas in Rural Block Headquarters (BHQs) unlimited number of free Internet access with 25% discount on PSTN access charges is permitted. In urban BHQs 1500 hours of Internet access per annum alongwith discount in PSTN charges equal to that given to STD/ISD/PCOs is permitted.

14. With a view to provide internet facility for the mass in North Eastern States and Sikkim, Community Information Centres are being set up at 486 blocks. Besides connectivity, the Centres are equipped with computer and information kiosks.